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ABSTRACT

Noting that surveys show that teens still value their parents' opinions, this booklet contains many helpful suggestions designed to get parents and their teens reading and talking together. Sections of the booklet are: "Where To Begin? Know Your Teen"; "How Can I Get My Teen To Read?"; "Give Your Teen Reasons To Read"; "Teens, Technology, and Reading"; and "Reading: One More Step toward Adulthood." (Contains lists of 16 recommended young adult books, 3 magazines for teens, 5 Internet resources for teens, 8 resources for parents, and 6 parent publications published by the International Reading Association.) (RS)

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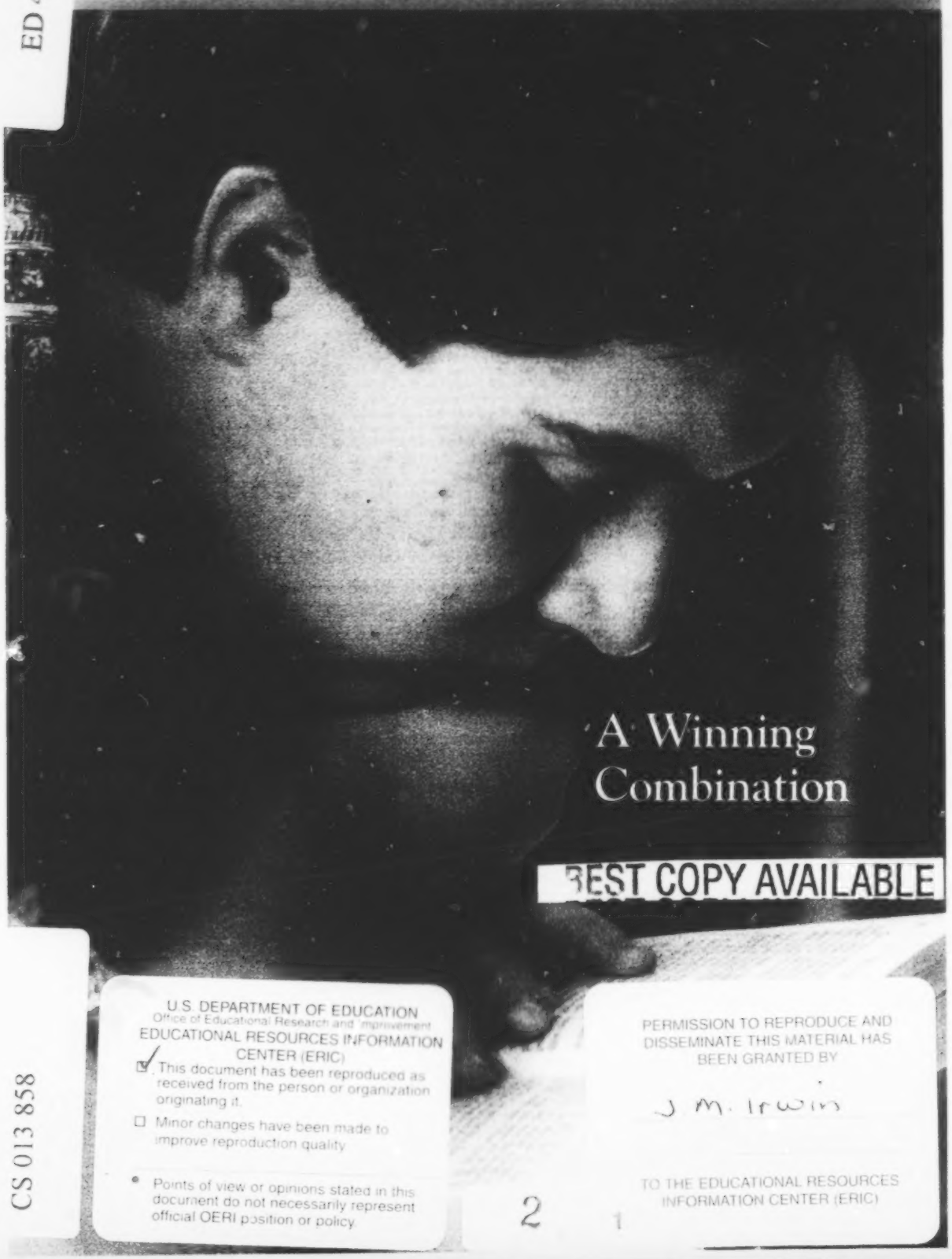
Parents, Teens, and Reading



A Winning Combination

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Parents, Teens, and Reading: A Winning Combination

"With all my schoolwork, I have no time to read for fun, even if I wanted to!"

"I like to spend my free time with my friends, not reading."

"Between practice and my after-school job, I'm lucky to get the reading for my classes done."

"I don't like to read. I'd rather watch television or play computer games."

Do any of these excuses sound familiar? Even if your teen was an avid reader in elementary school and middle school, when she enters high school, you may discover that almost all pleasure reading ceases. An increase in homework, the distractions of after-school activities and jobs, and your teen's growing social life may put an end to reading and may cause you to give up hope she will ever read for pleasure again.

Although it is true that teens are more independent than younger children, surveys show that they still value their parents' opinions. If you convey to your teen that reading is important to you, that she can derive benefit from it, and that it is an enjoyable leisure-time activity, you may be pleasantly surprised to see how readily her behavior changes. This booklet contains many helpful suggestions designed to get you and your teen reading and talking together.

Where to Begin? Know Your Teen

As teens enter and move through high school, they learn to think through ideas, to examine inner experience, to rely on themselves, and to think about the future. However, teens are also still very concerned about peer relationships and worry about their success in school. They begin to think about their role in society and the world. Parents recognize these concerns because they carry into adulthood.

The Social Side of Teens

Teenagers want to be socially accepted and successful, and both these needs are related closely to forming a sense of identity. Many teenagers acknowledge that having friends is the most important thing in their lives and admit that they go to school to see their friends. After-school activities provide important time for them to be with their friends, and teens are eager to do things with their friends on weekends. In all these social situations, teenagers develop a self-identity from the responses they get from their friends. Because reading doesn't play much of a role in these social events, many teens do not see themselves as readers beyond their school assignments.

Leave Me Alone

Teenagers also need privacy and often will go to great lengths to protect their own physical space and their thoughts and feelings. Shyer teens, who may be unsure of their identity, back away from social activities. They may not want to work, and sometimes they seem to lack a desire to succeed at anything. Some teens in this category are avid readers, perhaps because they seek to escape social pressures. But the information and knowledge they gain from reading can help them build the confidence and self-regard they may need to become more outgoing and communicative with friends.

Pressure to Succeed

Teens face increasing pressure to succeed in very specific ways. Parents encourage them to work hard at school to prepare for a better future. Schools are increasingly aware that they are accountable to taxpayers to train successful graduates, so teachers have raised their demands, assigning more difficult homework and more reading. Competitive job markets and achieving high grades that qualify them for postsecondary education have become more important issues in teens' thinking. Because of these demands, teens spend a lot of time working on school tasks, and after they've finished their school assignments, they have less time for personal reading. Nonreading activities may provide a more relaxing break.

Remember too that teens are living in a world in which the importance of material things has increased. This drives them to get after-school jobs. Parents often are pleased to see their children accept this kind of responsibility, get work experience, and earn their own money, but parents also realize that the jobs leave even less time for school and personal reading.

How Can I Get My Teen to Read?

After reading some of these characteristics of teenagers, you may be thinking that there is no good way to encourage your teen to read. He is past the age at which you have the kind of influence or control you had when he was in elementary school. But your input is still important, perhaps more than you realize. Beyond recognizing the specific pressures with which your teen is coping, getting him to read involves talking and listening to him, thinking about your definition of reading, providing reading materials, and modeling good reading behavior. Simple shifts in attitude can mean a great deal when it comes to encouraging your teen to read for pleasure.

Comic books, magazines, newspapers, and Web sites are important sources of reading pleasure for many teens.

Find Time to Talk

Many parents feel as though they never see their teen. Between jobs, social activities, and schoolwork, he may not ever be at home much. Make the most of any time he *is* home by asking questions about his reading. Try to sit down for a meal at least three or four times a week. Share your own thoughts and opinions about materials you are reading, including articles about current events.

Don't preach. Although this may seem obvious, it is important to note first that telling teens they ought to do something for their own good rarely is an effective tactic. Adults read for certain purposes, and it doesn't make a lot of sense to tell teens that they should read more simply because of the inherent value in reading.

Let your teen pick the topic. Sometimes parents forget that the things that are important to teens are different from those that are important to adults. Your teen may want to discuss and read about local sports teams, his favorite band, or clothing trends. Make sure you spend some time discussing subjects that are of interest to him and suggest reading materials that deal with these subjects.

Rethink Your Definition of Reading

Many teens (and their parents) think that reading equates with thick books full of difficult words. However, comic books, magazines, newspapers, Web sites, how-to manuals, and brochures are important sources of reading pleasure for many adults and teens. Encourage your teen to rethink the message about reading he may have gotten in school and to read anything he finds interesting. Accept the fact that he may be too busy to spend much time reading books, and encourage him to read shorter publications.

If your teen does like to read longer materials, there is a wide variety of books written specifically for teens. These may not meet the definition of "classic" literature, but they do deal with topics of interest to teenagers. This kind of reading is valuable because it provides reading practice and develops the reading habit.

Model the Importance of Reading

Try to demonstrate, in as natural a way as possible, how reading serves your needs. Teens will learn about reading if you involve them in your reading. Express your opinions in connection with magazine articles or talk about newspaper advertisements that describe products you are thinking

about buying. As your teen gets older, you can even recommend that he read books or magazine articles that you have found interesting.

Make sure your teen sees you reading for pleasure. Spend time in the evening or on weekends reading, and encourage him to sit with you as he does homework or reads for pleasure. Making a concentrated effort to turn off the television for some portion of each evening so that you can read will show your teen that you think it is a valuable activity.

Provide Easy Access to Reading Material

Notice the subjects of the television shows, movies, or videotapes your teen watches. Think about his favorite activities, sports, or hobbies. Although your teen may not want to visit the library or bookstore, you can go by yourself and pick up materials on subjects you think he'll like. Leave these materials around the house where you know he'll see them. You also might want to consider providing an allowance to purchase books or other reading materials, even if your teen has a job and earns his own spending money.

Ordering subscriptions to magazines you know your teen likes (see the Magazines for Teens list on page 19 for suggestions) or buying or subscribing to the newspaper and sitting down with him to read it are also good ideas. Many teens enjoy reading serial novels about fictional teens; if your child likes these books, buy new ones from the series as they are published and leave them where he will see them. You also could give books and subscriptions as birthday and holiday gifts.

Give Your Teen Reasons to Read

Teens use reasoning and worry about their future in many of the same ways as adults. Because teens are able to reason and make decisions about how to spend their time, they may need to have solid reasons to read before they'll do so willingly. Although some teens will read for pleasure voluntarily, many simply do not see any reasons to read. Make one of your goals to show your teen why reading is important—that it can be beneficial and fun for her now and that it will provide skills and knowledge that will be important throughout her life.

Think About the Future

On the career track. Find out what your teen thinks she wants to pursue as a career by asking her or talking with her teacher or guidance counselor. Then make a list that combines your teen's career interests with one or two careers you once dreamed of pursuing, and start gathering materials on them. Depending on the rapport you have with your teen, this could be a joint project. Or you could just place the materials in obvious places around the house.

In either case, a few phone calls and a library visit can get you started:

- Call the school guidance counselor again and ask where you could get some materials about the careers on your list;
- If you know people in the occupations on your list, ask them for some of the materials they often read; or
- Use the telephone directory to call people in different occupations. Ask them about magazines or professional publications concerning their occupations.

Begin reading these materials and initiating discussions about one or more occupations. For example, ask, "Did you see this article about what a designer does?" As your teenager develops an interest in several professions, you

might help her set up a chart listing different careers and important factors in choosing one—such as salary, work hours, benefits, and work location. You also may want to find out what kind of education or training your teen will need to pursue a specific career.

College bound. Planning for college or other special training after high school gives your teen a real reason to read for information. You or your teen can write or call the schools in which she is interested and ask for all the materials available. Books that discuss college life, give suggestions for choosing appropriate schools, and include sample application essays are also available. You can buy these books or borrow them from the library and spend time reading and discussing them with your teen.

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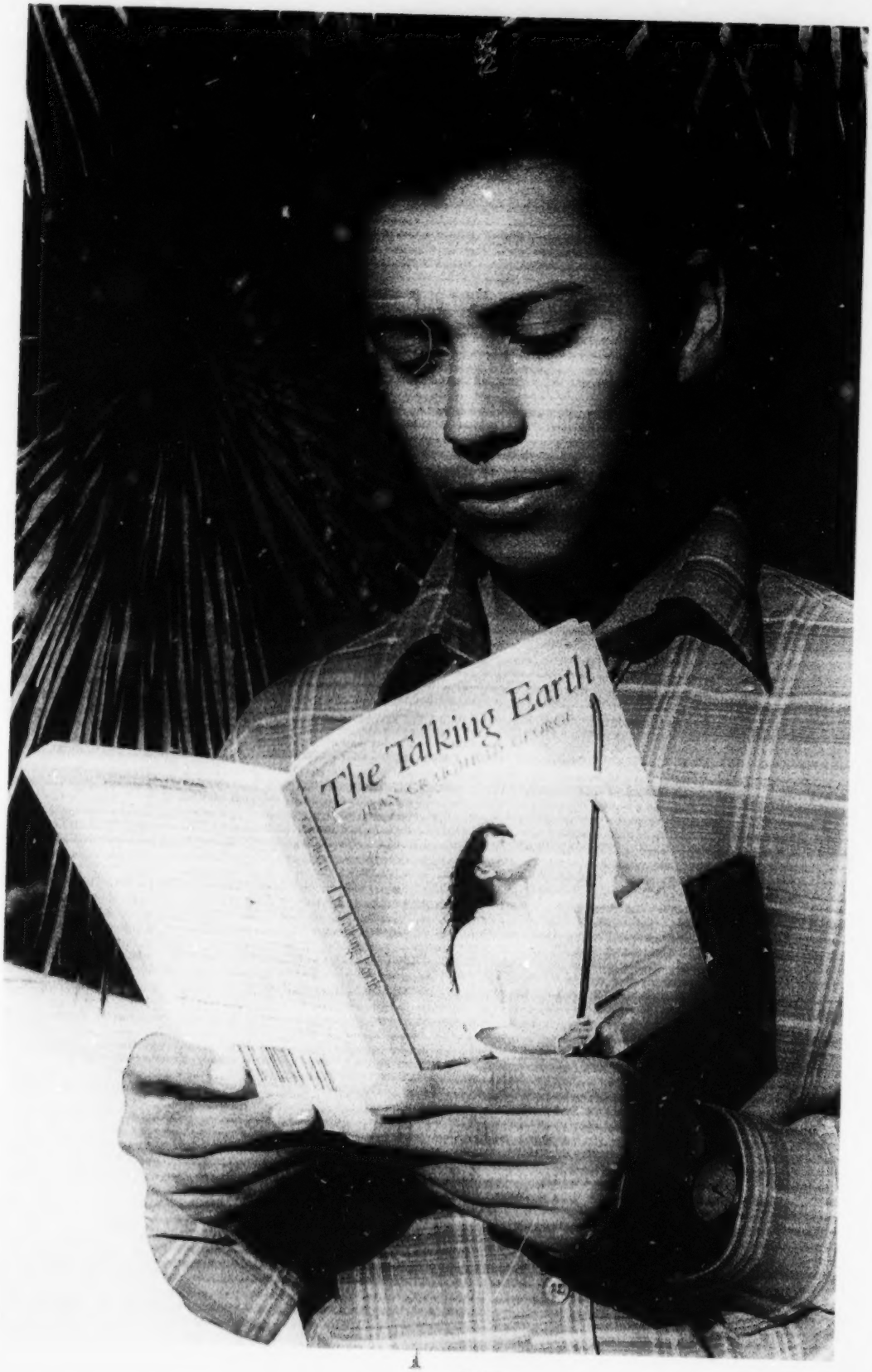
The Internet is another good source of information on colleges and universities. Most schools have their own Web sites that provide details about the campus, majors, courses, and professors. Many include pictures, and some even allow students to fill out applications online.

Encourage Reading Around the House

Assign your teen tasks that will require reading. If she has her own car, tell her you want her to learn to change the oil, and give her a book on auto maintenance. Or give her the assignment of planning one family meal per week, and a selection of cookbooks from which to choose recipes. If your teen is interested in a project such as redecorating her room, encourage her to look at books and magazines and to make lists of the items she wants. Shop with her and encourage her to compare prices. These kinds of real-life experiences will be valuable as your teen matures and will give her practice reading.



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Stop by a Bookstore or Library

When you are running errands with your teen, stop by a bookstore or library and browse. If you leave your teen on her own there she'll probably look at books or other reading materials she finds interesting. Pay attention to what she looks at and discuss it with her. Encourage her to buy or check out books that interest her.

If your teen has expressed interest in a new hobby or sport, suggest a trip to the library or bookstore to read up on it. Talk about the activity as you browse. You also might find reading materials about specific activities at specialty stores such as music stores, art supply stores, photography stores, or even sporting goods stores (many of which sell magazines about specific sports).

Encouraging your teen to use newspapers or magazines to develop and support opinions about issues gets her reading and starts a habit of seeking out information.

Encourage Your Teen to Travel Through Reading

Many teens begin to develop an interest in the world around them when they start high school. Foreign-language classes or history courses get them excited about visiting countries they are studying. Or they may want to visit the ocean after studying marine biology. Encourage your teen to seek out books on places she would like to visit. You also can visit the library or bookstore and find some of these materials.

If your family is taking a vacation, make sure you get informational material to share before you leave. And bring along books, magazines, and audio books to encourage reading on long car trips.

Start Your Own Debate Club

Parents realize that most teens object to being told what to think about something, and learn that arguments with their children over opinions aren't always produc-

tive. The teens, who don't have as much experience as the adults, may end up feeling as though they have "lost" a discussion about current events. Encouraging your teen to use newspapers or magazines to develop and support opinions about issues gets her reading and starts a habit of seeking out information from sources that will be useful throughout life.

Provide subjects for discussion. One way to get your teen to share her opinions is to hand her an article and ask, "What do you think of this?" Sharing newspaper or magazine stories about current events will help to keep her informed, which she will quickly realize gives her an advantage in any argument or discussion. Another way to get teens thinking—and reading—is to describe a problem or disagreement that raises questions or invites interpretation, perhaps something that happened or was said at work, on television, or at some community event.

Set aside time for discussion. When you have a few minutes with your teen, mention an issue or event the two of you have been reading and sharing information about and ask for an opinion. You don't always have to agree, and you may want to present some alternative perspectives based on something you have read. Be sure to show that you value your teen's opinion and that you are listening by asking her to expand on or clarify a point. And be patient if she's not articulate right away; teens are asked for their opinions so rarely that they might be reluctant to speak at first.

Admit when you need more information. You might suggest that you need to look up some information about an issue before you'll be able to form an opinion. By doing this, you show your teen that adults often need to seek information to make thoughtful decisions about issues facing us in society.

You can accelerate your teen's awareness of the importance of reading by listening carefully when she talks. Don't rush her. Ask questions to get more information. Being listened to and taken seriously is a gratifying experience for teens.

Keep Up With Local Events

Most teens are very involved with what is happening around them in school. For example, if your teen is involved in a sport, show her that the local newspaper is a good source of information about both her school teams and their opponents. Keeping up with the other teams can give you information for discussion.

Other good sources of information about sports, besides the nationally distributed sports magazines, are coaching magazines and high school athletic magazines published in each state. You can get the addresses of these publications from your teen's coach or from the school's athletic department.

Clipping and organizing articles, photos, and mementos in scrapbooks can indirectly get your teen to read. A scrapbook doesn't have to be about a sport or a sports hero, however. It could be about music, cars, designs, clothing, or any other interest.

Teens, Technology, and Reading

Your teen is more likely to be comfortable with technology than you are. Teens today have never known a world without cable television and personal computers. They most likely have watched television in school, used computers to complete assignments, and communicated with their friends using e-mail. You can use technology to encourage reading and develop connections with your teen.

Teens and Television

Your teen probably spends a great deal of time watching television, and you may be concerned about its negative impact on his learning. But television can be used as a source of reading. Paying attention to the shows your

teen watches will give you ideas about appropriate reading materials to provide for him. Science, science fiction, romance, mystery, comedy, and police books have been written for a teenage audience, so you can find books on topics similar to those on your teen's favorite shows.

Informational shows highlight topics your teen may be reading about in school and may provide opportunities for more research. If you know your teen enjoys his history class, seek out documentaries on events he is studying. Some of these programs have print materials to accompany them; ask your librarian or your teen's teacher for more information.

Entertainment shows can generate ideas, questions, and interests that merit seeking more information. For example, if your teen enjoys watching dramas about hospitals or doctors, you can encourage him to read books or magazine articles about real-life emergency rooms. You also can encourage him to watch videos or television productions of novels he has read, or vice versa.

Teens and the Internet

Many teens spend hours on the Internet, looking at Web sites that are of interest to them, visiting chat rooms, or writing e-mail to their friends. They may not be aware that this Internet use involves a lot of reading and writing. If you do not know much about the Internet, you may want to buy a book or take advantage of courses at your local library, so that you can share online experiences with your teen.

Ask your teen to take you on a tour. Have your teen show you his favorite Web sites, help you research information on a car you are thinking of buying, or give you a basic lesson on using the Internet. If you don't have Internet access at home, you can find it at your local library or your teen's school. Your teen will value the chance to share his knowledge, and you'll learn something useful.

Help your teen find Web sites. Your teen may not be aware of the many sites aimed at him. There are magazines written by and for teens, sites dedicated to authors of

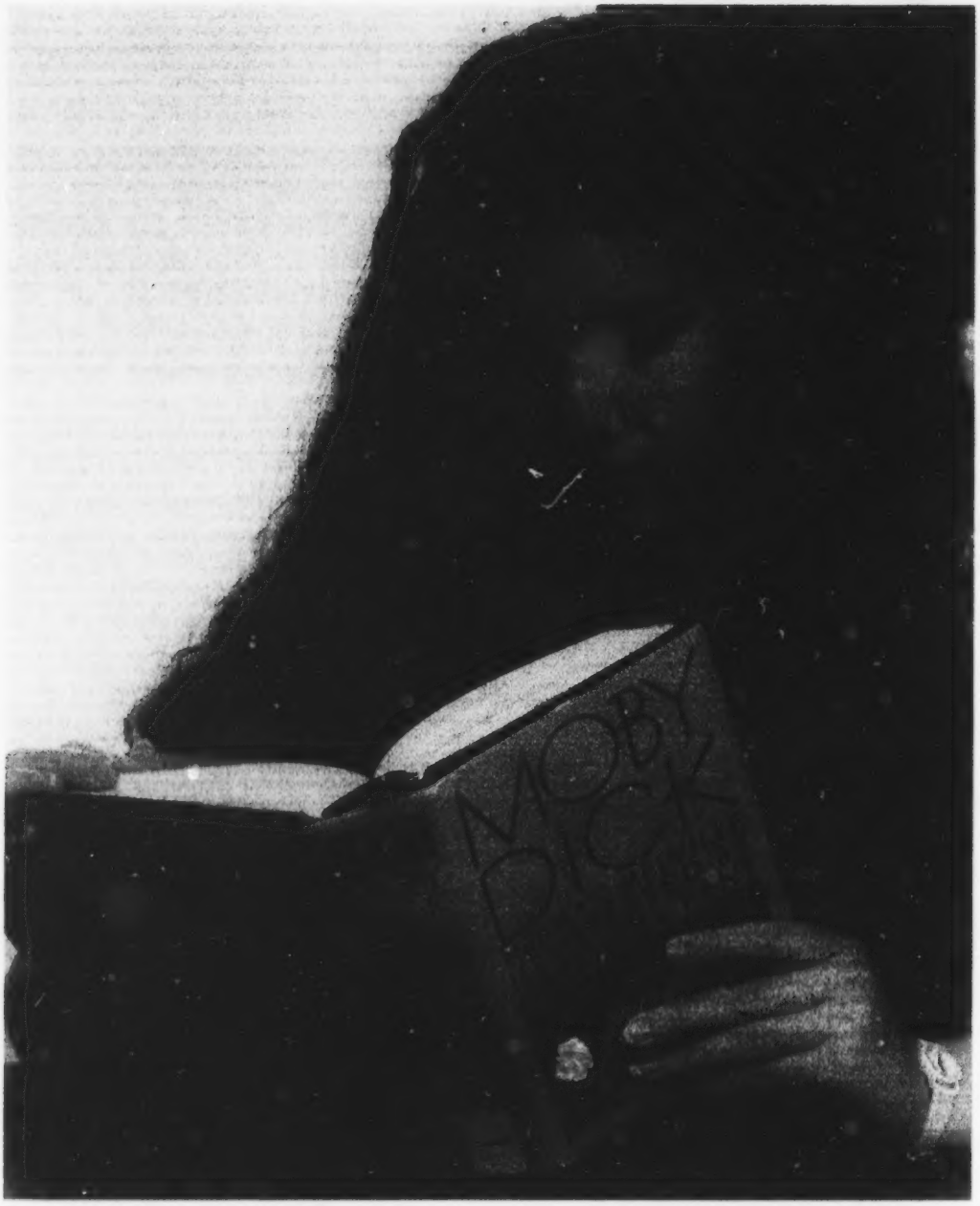
young adult fiction such as Judy Blume, and information available that can help with homework or research for colleges (see pages 19 and 20 for some Internet resources for teens). Explore the Internet with your teen, helping him to distinguish between sites that contain useful information and those that are less helpful.

Use e-mail. If you have an e-mail account at work and your teen has one at home, use it to communicate with him. Send him articles you find on the Internet, or tell him about interesting Web sites you have seen. If other relatives have e-mail, encourage him to write letters to them over the Internet.

Reading: One More Step Toward Adulthood

As a parent, you walk a wire between allowing your teen freedom to make her own choices, and wanting to protect and nurture her growth into adulthood. You want your child to read, but you don't want to (and indeed, cannot) force her to read. Attempts to pressure your teen will most likely be met with resistance; she'll always be conscious of what her peers are doing, and that may not be reading.

Although you may be tempted to say that there's nothing you can do, remember that your teen still lives in your house and sees you on a regular basis. The best thing you can do is attempt to introduce her to reading casually and naturally, through modeling, providing a selection of reading materials, and encouraging discussion. And once you have experienced some success in promoting reading, be careful not to lose it. Don't be too concerned with "correctness" in reading or discussion. Enjoy reading and talking with your teen without being overly critical of her ideas or choices. Don't pressure your teen to finish books she has started or link punishment to reading.



Your teen is probably almost as busy as, if not busier than you are. Respecting that fact, and the choices your teen has made, is important, but so is taking time to share interests and reading materials. Once you start, you will find that your teen becomes more and more excited about reading.

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Resources

Books for Teens

Following is a brief list of recommended young adult books that are appropriate for children in ninth through twelfth grades. Many of the authors of these books have written other books for teens, some of them about the same characters. Consult your librarian or your teen's teacher for more titles.

Fiction

Canyons, Gary Paulsen, Laurel Leaf, 1991.

The Chocolate War, Robert Cormier, Laurel Leaf, 1991.

Connections: Short Stories by Outstanding Writers for Young Adults, Donald Gallo, Editor, Laurel Leaf, 1990.

Join In: Multiethnic Short Stories by Outstanding Writers for Young Adults, Donald Gallo, Editor, Laurel Leaf, 1995.

Meet the Austins, Madeleine L'Engle; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997.

The Book of Three, Lloyd Alexander, Yearling, 1978.

The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros, Vintage, 1991.

Tears of a Tiger, Sharon M. Draper, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Tiger Eyes, Judy Blume, Laurel Leaf, 1982.

What Girls Learn, Karin Cook, Random House, 1997.

When She Was Good, Norma Fox Mazer, Scholastic Trade, 1997.

Nonfiction

Into Thin Air, Jon Krakauer, Anchor, 1997.

Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam, Sonsyrea Tate, HarperCollins, 1997.

Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollections, Gary Soto, Laurel Leaf, 1992.

Mama's Girl, Veronica Chambers, Berkeley, 1997.

Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution, Ji Li Jiang, HarperCollins, 1997.

Magazines for Teens

Blue Jean Magazine (PO Box 90856, Rochester, NY 14609). This magazine is multicultural, advertisement free, and full of articles about what teen girls are thinking, saying, and doing. Teens can publish articles and artwork here.

Career World (Weekly Reader Corp., 3001 Cindel Drive, Delran, NJ 08370). Is your teen already thinking about a career? This magazine provides articles focusing on specific careers and jobs for students.

Teen People (PO Box 60001, Tampa, FL 33660-0001). This is a just-for-teens version of the popular adult magazine. It includes celebrity interviews and articles about famous teens.

Internet Resources for Teens

The sites described here are good starting points and will provide many links for you and your teen to explore together.

- TeenHoopla, part of the American Library Association site at http://www.ala.org/teenhoopla, includes links to other teen-oriented sites; book reviews; forums for teens, including discussions about books; and reading tips.
- The Hungry Mind Review at http://www.bookwire.com/hmr/Review/recom.html includes a listing of various authors' favorite books for young adults.
- A fun and empowering Web magazine for teenage girls is *Teengrrl* at http://www.teengrrl.com, where the articles and columns are written by a panel of teens. Subjects include political and gender issues, music, sports, and reading.
- Straight Talk About School at http://www.balancenet.org is sponsored by the National Association of

Secondary School Principals and the GTE corporation and is centered around a new topic each month. Sections include forums, articles, quizzes, advice from experts, and resources for college, careers, volunteering, and stress management.

- An interesting site for high school students and their parents is Children's Express: By Children for Everybody at http://www.ce.org, where kids can read articles written by other kids on a variety of current topics, submit articles and story ideas, and answer polls that include questions such as "For their own protection, should teachers be allowed to arm themselves in school?" This site, based in England and the United States, aims to empower children and teens by giving them a chance to express themselves in a public forum.

Resources for Parents

Books. These books include suggestions for helping your high school student read more, activities to get young adults excited about reading, and lists of age-appropriate books and magazines.

Adolescents at Risk: A Guide to Fiction and Nonfiction for Young Adults, Parents, and Professionals, Joan Kaywell, Greenwood, 1993.

Magazines for Kids and Teens, Donald Stoll, Editor, International Reading Association and the Educational Press Association of America, 1997.

More Books Appeal: Keep Young Teens in the Library, Karen C. Gomberg, McFarland, 1990.

More Teens' Favorite Books: Young Adults' Choices 1993–1995, International Reading Association, 1996.

99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading: and 100 Books They'll Love, Mary Leonhardt, Crown, 1997.

Internet sites. A wealth of information is available for parents on the Internet, including many lists of books for teens. You can even buy books online. Here are a few

places to get started, but don't stop here; these sites include numerous links to sites about reading and parenting:

- The New York Times Learning Network at http://wwwnytimes.com/learning is full of information for parents and kids. Here you will find article summaries on current events, letters to the editor, and "Ask a Reporter" sections. Crossword puzzles based on current topics and links of vocabulary words to a dictionary site are other features.
- The Young Adult Library Services Administration division of the American Library Association publishes booklists for young adults at http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/index.html. The lists include the Alex awards, given to books written for adults that are also excellent for teens. You also will find links at http://www.ala.org/yalsa/yasites/index.html that will appeal to your teen.
- A great site for parents seeking advice about how to help their children learn is the Family Education Network at http://www.familyeducation.com, which includes articles and discussion groups about such topics as special education and school-parent relations.

IRA Parent Publications

Parent brochures. The International Reading Association publishes a series of brochures for parents. Single copies are free upon request by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139, USA. Requests from outside the United States should include an envelope, but postage is not required. The titles in the series, all of which also are available in Spanish, follow.

Get Ready to Read! Tips for Parents of Young Children
Explore the Playground of Books: Tips for Parents of Beginning Readers
Summer Reading Adventure! Tips for Parents of Young Readers

Making the Most of Television: Tips for Parents of Young Viewers

See the World on the Internet: Tips for Parents of Young Readers—and "Surfers"

Library Safari: Tips for Parents of Young Readers and Explorers

Young Adults' and *Teachers' Choices*. See what young adults and teachers across the United States have chosen to read. *Young Adults' Choices* is an annotated, illustrated list of favorite books chosen by junior and senior high students from across the United States. *Teachers' Choices* is an annotated, illustrated booklist for all ages identified by teachers as those most helpful and enjoyable to use in the classroom.

Single copies of the annotated *Choices* lists are available by sending a self-addressed 9"×12" envelope and US$1.00 postage and handling for each list to the International Reading Association, Department E.G., 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139, USA.

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